

Lexington Park, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) met today at HOPE Place in Lexington Park with St. Mary's "Service Integration Team," a group of area representatives working together to combat homelessness in St. Mary's County. The group discussed how service integration strategies have been working in the community and what steps can be taken to better serve those in need. In addition, Rep. Hoyer heard from those personally impacted by homelessness, as well as representatives from the Community Development Corporation regarding economic development and the business community.

"At a time when Maryland families and individuals have felt the impact of this economic downturn in lost homes, lost savings and lost jobs, it is very important that we work together to help communities' most vulnerable residents," **stated Rep. Hoyer.** "We are critically aware of the problems facing homeless populations in St. Mary's County, and by working together and addressing these challenges, we can begin to take the steps needed to substantially reduce the occurrence of homelessness in St. Mary's County."

According to a January 2008 survey, there are 1,884 homeless (sheltered and unsheltered) individuals in St. Mary's County. This total reflects 883 households, over half with dependent children. Of that total, 111 individuals were classified as chronically homeless, 153 persons were assessed as severely mentally ill, 125 persons were assessed as chronic substance abusers, 7 individuals were veterans, and 51 persons were found to be victims of domestic violence.

"The St. Mary's community has a long history of coming together to help those in need," **said Kathleen O'Brien, the Director of Walden/Sierra, a nonprofit serving Southern Maryland through crisis services, counseling and substance abuse treatment.** "In 2009, St. Mary's County reported no fatalities as a result of domestic violence. We believe Recovery Act money ensured the safety of St. Mary's residents and demonstrates another way in which service integration - all parts of the community coming together - can make a difference in the lives of many of our most vulnerable residents."

Using Recovery Act funds, the St. Mary's County *Enhancing Victims' Experiences in Recovery* project was able to make available a streamlined, victim-friendly domestic violence response in St. Mary's County. The program coordinates case management and data sharing among members of the local Family Violence Coordinating Council and supports victims throughout their recovery. As a result, abusers are held accountable for their actions, and victims have a safe environment to recover and move on with their lives.

In order for public and private service providers to collaborate on addressing social issues in the

community, Walden/Sierra opened HOPE Place in 2009 - a site where the coalition can work together to assist community members in their times of need. The Service Integration Team meets at Hope Place to plan for new and enhanced services in wellness, employment, life skills, peer and continuing care support. A goal for Service Integration is to offer outreach, engagement and service access to homeless-impacted persons.

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